

# PSC Consumer Connection



*Informed Consumers, Quality Utility Services, and a Dedicated Organization for Missourians in the 21st Century*

Issue 13 - January 2005

A quarterly publication of the Missouri Public Service Commission  
Public Information & Education Department

## Natural Gas Prices

What the wholesale supplier charges your local natural gas company is determined in an unregulated market. Congress deregulated natural gas over a decade ago. Today, prices are determined in an open, competition-based market.

Your local natural gas company must make a filing with the Public Service Commission in order to increase or decrease your natural gas rates to reflect wholesale supplier price changes.

**The role of the Missouri Public Service Commission is limited when it comes to rate changes associated with the actual cost of natural gas. The Commission does not regulate wholesale supplier rates.**

Wholesale prices are subject to wide variations depending on a number of factors including supply, demand and weather. Colder than normal weather tends to drive natural gas prices upward.

### **What you can do to conserve energy:**

- Have your furnace checked and tuned-up if needed and replace furnace filters each month when dirty.
- Consider contacting the local natural gas company to ask about budget billing, which spreads total energy costs over a 12-month period. Budget billing amounts may be adjusted at various times during the 12-month period.
- Add attic insulation if necessary. Heat rises and without adequate home insulation that heat will quickly leak outdoors into the atmosphere. Some consumers may be eligible for weatherization assistance.
- Place weather stripping around doors, use plastic film covering and caulk windows to keep heat from escaping from your home. Close fireplace dampers when the fireplace is not being used. Have the chimney checked for blockage.
- Place an approved insulated cover-jacket around your hot water heater. Set your water heater temperature to 120 degrees.
- Use caution with gas-fired appliances; get professional help for any projects that are beyond your personal capabilities.
- Assess whether it is time to replace your furnace with a more efficient model.

## Families of Missouri National Guard Troops in Iraq to Receive AT&T Prepaid Calling Cards

The Missouri Public Service Commission has approved an agreement which will place AT&T Prepaid Calling Cards into the hands of approximately 1,500 families of Missouri National Guard troops either staged to go or deployed and on active duty in Iraq. The AT&T Prepaid Calling Cards will provide up to a half-hour of calling to Iraq.

“The Commission appreciates the sacrifices made by Missouri military personnel who are stationed in Iraq and their families,” stated PSC Chair Steve Gaw. “We are pleased this agreement will provide an opportunity for Missouri National Guard families of soldiers in Iraq to communicate with their loved ones. We appreciate AT&T’s gesture of support for our military personnel in Iraq and their families.”

The agreement reached between the Public Service Commission and AT&T resolves issues regarding AT&T erroneously charging over 29,000 Missouri consumers a monthly recurring charge of \$3.95 in early 2004. AT&T has also entered into an agreement regarding issues related to the erroneous \$3.95 monthly charge with the Missouri Attorney General.

The PSC Staff conducted an investigation regarding the mis-application of the charge. In addition to the bill credits and refunds, AT&T has made a good will gesture of providing these prepaid calling cards for Missouri National Guard families.

Effective January 1, 2004, AT&T properly added, to AT&T long distance customers enrolled in AT&T’s interstate Basic Rate plan, a monthly charge of \$3.95. However, the charge also began appearing on certain of AT&T residential long distance subscribers not enrolled in that particular plan as well as to certain customers who were not AT&T customers.

Upon finding the error, AT&T corrected those information systems which caused the error to occur and processed refunds and bill credits totaling over \$285,000 to Missouri consumers who were erroneously billed.



### Denial of Service

Utilities may refuse to commence service to an applicant for various reasons. The PSC's rule (effective November 1, 2004) establishes procedures to be followed by the utilities to insure reasonable and uniform standards exist for denial of service. The rule also protects applicant(s) at the time of their application, from being required to pay for the bill incurred by other individuals for service from which the applicant(s) did not receive substantial benefit.

A utility **MAY REFUSE** to commence service to an applicant for any of the following reasons:

1. Failure to pay an undisputed delinquent utility charge for services provided by that utility or its regulated affiliate;
2. Failure to post a required deposit or guarantee;
3. Refusal or failure to permit inspection, maintenance, replacement or meter reading of utility equipment;
4. Misrepresentation of identity;
5. Violation of any other rules of the utility which affects safety of the customer or other persons;
6. As provided by state or federal law;
7. Failure of a previous owner or occupant to pay delinquent utility charges where the previous owner or occupant remains an occupant;
8. Failure to comply with the terms of a settlement agreement; or
9. Unauthorized interference, diversion of utility's service by the applicant or by a previous owner or occupant who remains an occupant.

**Note:** *A utility may refuse to commence service temporarily for reasons of maintenance, health, safety or a state of emergency until the reason for such refusal has been resolved.*

A utility **MAY NOT REFUSE** to commence service to an applicant for any of the following reasons:

1. Failure to pay for merchandise, appliances or services not subject to commission jurisdiction as an integral part of the utility service provided by the utility;
2. Failure to pay the bill of another customer. In order to deny service the utility must show that:
  - a. the applicant and the other customer lived at the same address during the time the service was provided;
  - b. the bill was incurred within the past seven years;
  - c. the utility has attempted to collect the unpaid bill from the customer of record; and
  - d. at the time of the request for service, the bill remains unpaid and not in dispute.

**Note:** *The utility shall commence service at an existing residential service location as close as reasonably possible to the day specified by the customer for service to commence, but no later than, three business days following the day specified by the customer for service to commence provided that the applicant has complied with all requirements of this rule.*

**This is a summary of the Denial of Service rule (4 CSR 240-13.035). The full text of the rule is available at the Secretary of State's Office or on the Commission website at <http://www.psc.mo.gov/rules.asp>**

### Manufactured Housing & Modular Units Program Storm Damaged Homes

The PSC is responsible for the regulation of all new manufactured homes and modular units. During the recent summer months, severe storms damaged some homes on retail dealer lots as well as homes set up on the homeowner's site. If a home on a retail dealer's lot sustained damage due to a storm, a prohibitive sale notice issued by the PSC's Manufactured Housing & Modular Units Program should be on that home. These homes cannot be sold to consumers until they are repaired and in compliance with the applicable building codes and safety standards.

If you have questions regarding a manufactured home or modular home on a dealer lot or a home you own that may have incurred storm damage and you would like to have your home inspected, contact the Missouri Public Service Commission's Manufactured Housing & Modular Units Program at **800-819-3180**. The PSC's field staff will conduct home inspections, if requested by the consumer. These inspections are free and are designed to ensure compliance with all building codes and safety standards and to determine whether the home or unit is set-up and anchored correctly.

For more information regarding manufactured homes or modular units or how to file a request for an inspection, call **1-800-819-3180** or check our web site at **[www.psc.mo.gov](http://www.psc.mo.gov)** and click on the Home icon.



**LOCAL PUBLIC HEARING: Mill Creek Sewers, Inc.** request for a rate increase that would raise monthly sewer rates for residential customers from \$5.00 to \$30.11.

**January 24, 2005**

**St. Louis County Library, Florissant Valley Branch  
195 New Florissant Road, Florissant, Missouri  
General Information Session -- 5:30 p.m.  
Hearing -- 6:00 p.m.**

**For printed materials** regarding a number of consumer issues or copies of this newsletter, please call 573-751-7491 or email [joyce.neuner@psc.mo.gov](mailto:joyce.neuner@psc.mo.gov)



**Who to Contact:** Missouri Public Service Commission  
Consumer Hotline **1-800-392-4211**  
or email: [pscinfo@psc.mo.gov](mailto:pscinfo@psc.mo.gov)

**Mail your inquiry or complaint to:**  
Missouri Public Service Commission  
Consumer Services Department  
P.O. Box 360  
Jefferson City, MO 65102